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AUTHOR Slapin, Beverly; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The guide to evaluating children's books for "handicapism" (the attitudes, stereotypes, and discrimination by society against people with disabilities) offers specific guidelines, reviews 25 children's books, and discusses handicapism in fairy tales. Readers are encouraged to evaluate books by asking 14 questions such as: (1) Are the disabled/different characters depicted as one-dimensional or, alternatively, are they depicted as having individual and complex personalities? (2) Are they passive, dependent, and/or asexual or, alternatively, are they contributing, competent, independent people? (3) Does the story evoke sorrow or pity or, alternatively, does the story evoke genuine compassion? The books reviewed are for the pre-kindergarten through fourth grade and include some rated as outstanding, some rated as very poor, and some rated as "near-misses." A list of 43 recommended books includes books for pre-kindergarten through high school. (DB)

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We wish to thank the staff of Council on Interracial Books for Children, from whom we received much useful information. We recommend that you read CIBC's Bulletin, vol. 8, #s 6 & 7, 1977; and vol. 13, #s 4 & 5, 1982; for further analysis of this subject.

We also wish to thank Howard Traylor and Vail Reese, for computer training; and Barbara Traylor, for binding.

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What do we mean by "handicapism"?

"Handicapism" refers to the attitudes, stereotypes, and discrimination by society against people with disabilities. As racism, sexism, and ageism discriminate against people of color, women, and old people; handicapism, along with "looksism," assaults people with disabilities.

The word "handicap" is thought to be derived from the time when people with disabilities had no choice but to beg in the streets, cap in hand.

In the late sixties and early seventies, as part of the overall battle for civil rights which was taking place all over the country, people with disabilities were becoming vocal and visible: stopping buses during rush hour to protest the lack of wheelchair access on public transportation; demonstrating for curb cuts; and sitting in at city halls to demand equal, integrated education.

As a result of these struggles, Section 504, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, was passed; and in 1975, Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act mandated that all children with disabilities are entitled to a free public education "in the least restrictive environment." This meant that when a child with a disability could learn best in a "regular" classroom, the school was obligated to provide support services to help that child function there. Support might include a wheelchair ramp, a braille

transcriber, a sign-language interpreter, or a para-professsional aide in the classroom.

Also in the lates sixties--and continuing to the present--a plethora of children's books were published, which featured children with disabilities, or focused on the issue of disability.

The wonderful thing about books is that they are plentiful, relatively inexpensive, and can be strong forces in attitude formation and role modeling. Stories can be read, reread, memorized, changed, adapted, and used as a starting point for a variety of classroom activities, such as art, drama, songs, and craft projects. Books open doors to ideas.

Books featuring children with disabilities can promote positive values: they can encourage cultural diversity; they can teach young people to recognize similarities and respect differences. Or, if they contain handicapist stereotypes, they can send messages of alienation and apartness, and can be hurtful to both disabled and non-disabled readers. For disabled children, as for children of color and girls, stereotypes limit aspirations and lead to doubt of self-worth. For non-disabled children, as for white children and boys, stereotypes lead to false feelings of superiority.

Here are a few words from Eloise Greenfield, a much-loved and respected children's book writer, who considers writing for children both a "joy and a responsiblity":

> In this society, our conditioning has been, to a great extent, irrational and harmful. This country was built on a foundation of racism, a foundation which is only slightly less firm after centuries of Black struggle. Attitudes toward women, toward men, attitudes regarding age, height, beauty, mental and physical disabilities have been largely of the kind that constrain rather than encourage development. To perpetuate these attitudes through the use of the written word constitutes a gross and arrogant misuse of talent and skill.
>
> The books that reach children should: authentically depict and interpret their lives and their history; build self-respect and encourage the development of positive values; make children aware of their strength and leave them with a sense of hope and direction; teach them the skills necessary for the maintenance of health and for economic survival; broaden their knowledge of the world, past and present, and offer some insight into the future.*

With these standards and values in mind, let's conjure up some of the disabled or different story book characters we grew up with: Klara in Heidi, Tiny Tim in A Christmas Carol, The Little Lame Prince, Rumpelstiltskin, the witch in Hansel and Gretel, Black Dog, Pew, and Long John Silver in Treasure Island, Captain Ahab in Moby Dick, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Captain Hook in Peter Pan, The Nearsighted Mr. Magoo, the "Three Blind Mice," "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," the seven dwarfs in Snow White, the ugly stepsisters in Cinderella, the beast in Beauty and the Beast, Porky Pig, Elmer Fudd, Tweety Bird, and virtually every character Jerry Lewis ever portrayed.

Now let's ask ourselves this question: When we were growing up, did we see disabled or different people, or if we were disabled, did we see

*Eloise Greenfield, "Writing for Children--A Joy and a Responsibility," CIBC Bulletin, vol. 10, #3, 1979. Reprinted with permission.

ourselves, as grotesque, evil, ugly, pitiable, laughable, weird, outsiders? If the answer is "yes," then those of us who have disabilities and those of us who don't have been done a great disservice.

There are many, many more stereotypes that inundate children's literature--both "classics" and current stories--and, due to space limitations, we will discuss them in the form of a checklist. When choosing books, here are some questions you might ask about disabled/different characters or stories featuring them:

1. Are the disabled/different characters one-dimensional (clumsy or foolish, evil or malicious)? Are they depicted as childish or childlike, even if they are adults?

   or

   Do the disabled/different characters have individual and complex personalities?

2. Are they always sad; always the recipient of pity; preoccupied with the hope of recovery? Are they more sensitive, or more angry or bitter, than the average person? Is the disability synonymous with their being somehow incomplete?

   or

   Are they complete people, relating to peers and having thoughts which are not related to their disability? Are they capable of a full range of emotions?

3. Are they passive, dependent, asexual?

or

Are they contributing, competent, independent people?

4. Are their physical characteristics related to their personalities?

or

Are their physical descriptions separate from their personalities?

5. Are they described as beautiful or handsome, except for their disabilities? Are clothing, activities or aspirations described only in terms of limitations?

or

Are they attractive people who could have a sweetheart or sexual partner? Do they see themselves as capable, loving, sexual?

6. Do they have special powers because of their disability/differentness? Is there a relationship between their attractiveness or goodness and physical improvement?

or

Have they acquired skills which require ingenuity, since disability requires constant adapting and creative problem-solving?

7. Do they become cured solely because of a "positive attitude"? Is their "bad attitude" the only thing standing in the way of success?

or

Are societal barriers explored in discussing "attitudes"?

8. Do they have a miraculous recovery due to the intervention of one of the main characters?

or

Can they find their strengths and answers without having to be rescued?

9. Are the non-disabled characters always helping them, or are the non-disabled characters especially wonderful for being friends with them?

or

Are they depicted as the helper or good friend?

10. Are they always alone?

or

Do they have a home, children; are they part of the community?

11. Do they get victimized or killed off?

or

Are they shown as people who can protect themselves?

12. Are they "just like you"?

or

Is each person seen as an individual with similarities to and differences from "you"?

13. Is the language oppressive: cripple, lame, handicapped, feeble-minded, deaf-mute, reetard? Is the language euphemistic or cutesy: "handicapable," "differently-abled"?

or

Is the language respectful: disabled, developmentally disabled, deaf, hearing impaired, mobility-impaired?

14. Does the story evoke sorrow or pity?

or

Does the story evoke genuine compassion?

A few words about stereotypes

Some people with disabilities are more compassionate than are non-disabled people. Some of us are angry and bitter. Some of us are desperately lonely, sad, or depressed. Some of us have an extraordinarily well-developed sense of humor, and may appear as comics to those who do not know us. And most of us are sensitive, sad, funny, and angry--at appropriate times.

Positive attitudes sometimes do promote healing, and it is important to look at what enables us to have positive attitudes, and what hinders us. Generally, having supportive friends and family, a good job, someone to love, help. Class and racial barriers, and societal barriers--like job discrimination, inaccessible transportation and buildings, exorbitantly expensive adaptive equipment--hinder.

Those of us who have disabilities or are oppressed in other ways develop our attitudes as an outgrowth of our experiences. So there is nothing wrong with depicting someone with a disability as more sensitive or compassionate, or even as angry and bitter. What is wrong is not to show or validate the pain and oppression from which these qualities have emerged; to show us as either naturally compassionate or else as angry at ourselves, and not at the forces which oppress us.

And that is one reason why it is usually inappropriate for a well-meaning author who is non-disabled or has no personal experience with disability to attempt the complicated task of describing us, or telling our

stories. If a non-disabled person has a special interest in this subject, then it is imperative to enlist the aid and consultation of the disabled community.

With these guidelines in mind, and with the awareness that not every book will fit each of these criteria, let's review some of the current books which feature disability.

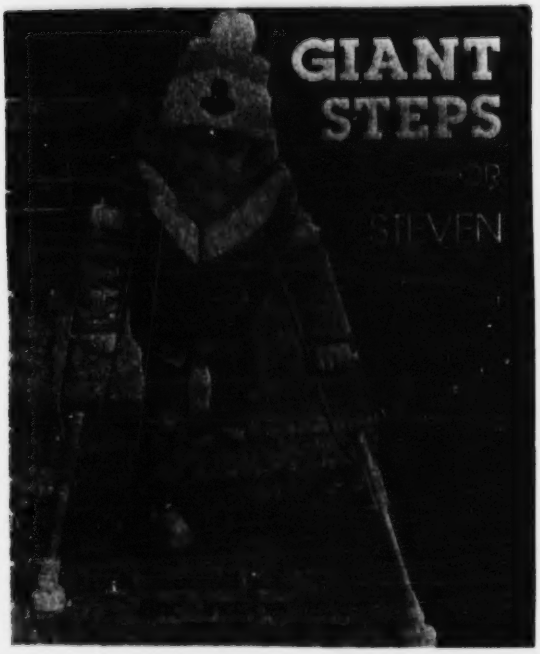
Be forewarned--children's literature about disability is plentiful and varied, and we counted hundreds of titles in this category. A lot of the newer books, although written with suppposedly good intentions, turn out to be uninformed, paternalistic, and handicapist. Others are poorly written or poorly illustrated texts with disabled characters. Some try hard, but, for one reason or another, miss. And still others combine insightful, inspired writing with an honest and accurate presentation--in short, they are simply wonderful.

This is, we admit, not a scientific survey. We read over 100 books (several times each), but limitations of space and our energy forbid us to review them all here. So we have chosen several of the best, several of the near-misses, and a few of the worst to present here. Although we decided to limit our review books to the pre-kindergarten to fourth-grade range, the books in our recommended list range from pre-kindergarten through high school.

Some of the books we have reviewed, and some of those in our recommended list on the last pages, may be out of print. If this is the case, they may be found in libraries, used book stores, flea markets, and garage sales.

Code

*	Don't bother.
**	Tried hard, but missed.
***	Good.
****	Great!



Bennett, Carol J., Giant Steps for Steven. After School Exchange, 1980.

Giant Steps describes how Steven, a four-year-old with spina bifida, has learned to get around, dress himself, and even catheterize himself to stay dry. Through sensitive black-and-white photos by Edward Cerutti and Pete Copeland, Steven comes across as a competent, happy child with a well-developed sense of self-worth. This book was lovingly written by Steven's

mother, and would be excellent for kindergarteners or first graders. It easily lends to discussions about the ways people are different, and how they can adapt.****

Biklin, Douglas, and Michelle Sokoloff, eds., What Do You Do When Your Wheelchair Gets a Flat Tire? Scholastic Book Exchange, 1978.

This book was originally printed as a companion to "Feeling Free," six half-hour TV episodes about disability for children. The title is one of hundreds of questions the editors collected from children all over the country, and answered by the people who know best--kids with diabilities. In the book, we get to know Ginny, Raymond, Hollis, Brian, and Agnes, who honestly and candidly answer the questions. (Agnes says, "People try to help me get out of my wheelchair and I don't even need the help. I say that I'm o.k., but they think because I have cerebral palsy that I can't do things. I can't get mad at them because they don't know how much I can or can't do. Usually I just let them do it. I wish they would ask me first before helping me.")

What Do You Do combats handicapism by showing a racially mixed group of children dealing realistically with their disabilities. We recommend this book highly. It's wonderful!****

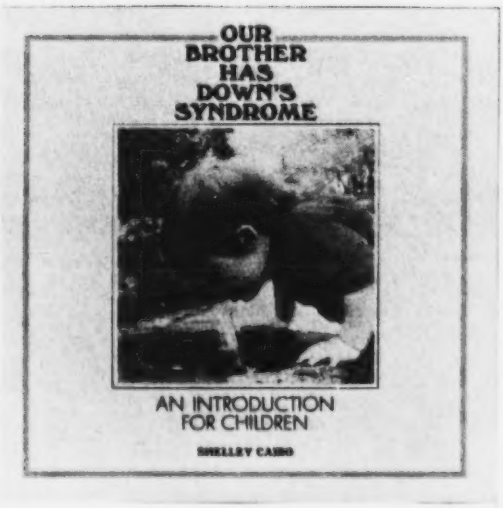
We also recommend three related books: Feeling Free by Mary Beth Sullivan, Alan J. Brightman, and Joseph Blatt (Addison-Wesley, 1979); Scholastic's Feeling Free Activities and Stories by Helen Benham (Scholastic, 1978); and What's the Difference? by Douglas Biklin, Ellen Barnes, and Carol Berrigan (American Institutes for Research and Syracuse University, 1978).

Brown, Tricia, Someone Special, Just Like You. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982.

The author, who is the mother of a non-disabled four-year-old, wrote this book "to help him understand that we should accept one another for the love we have to share with the world, and not judge on the basis of physical appearances or limitations."

We read this book several times, and had very mixed feelings about it. The photos, of young children with various disabilities engaging in everyday activities--singing, dancing, going down slides, blowing bubbles, eating ice cream--are superb; they even have a balanced racial mix. The poetic thoughts on children--"What makes someone special are the same things that make you special, too! A beautiful smile, sweet kisses, and lots of hugs"--are lyrical.

But it falls into the trap that snares non-disabled people over and over again--the trap of sameness; the denial of real differences. When a child with a disability falls down, the impact that falls have on her life is not the same as for "you." Children readily notice what is different from themselves, and express their natural curiosity. Stifling this instinct through admonishment to "stop staring" at or "stop bothering" a disabled person with questions leads to a refusal to honor these differences. Instead, children should be taught to say hello and meet the eyes of someone they are curious about, and ask respectful questions. Then they can receive answers and make a friend at the same time. Perhaps if the author had had more contact with disabled people herself, she would have been able to include this awareness in her book. This was not a simple book to evaluate. It was well-intentioned, but missed the mark.** 1/2



Cairo, Shelley, Jasmine, and Tara, Our Brother Has Down's Syndrome. Annick Press, 1985.

In this sweet little book, Jasmine and Tara describe Down Syndrome objectively, and their toddler brother, Jai, lovingly: "Jai may not talk as much as other kids his age, and it took him longer to learn to walk. We spend more time teaching him things but he cries like other kids and he smiles like other kids. He is curious about the world--just like other kids. He likes animals ...and he likes to play monster with our dad. He likes Santa and loves going for a swing...and loves ice cream! ...and he gives terrific kisses!" The family-album photos show Jai at his play group and working with a therapist, at the beach, messing up at home, playing with his sisters, and doing everyday toddler-things. Unlike Someone Special, Our Brother describes what is

different about Jai, as well as how he is similar to other kids his age. And unlike the depressing My Brother Steven is Retarded (see review below), this is a fine introduction for non-disabled kids and for kids who have a retarded sibling.****

Charlip, Remy, Mary Beth, and George Ancona, Handtalk. Four Winds, 1974.

"You don't have to use your mouth to talk. You can talk with your eyes, your face, your hands, your body." Handtalk is an introduction to two kinds of sign language: fingerspelling, or forming words letter-by-letter with the fingers; and signing, or making signs with one or two hands for each word or idea. Using one word or concept for each letter of the alphabet, Handtalk is a lovely, innovative little picture book with an integrated cast of performers who are members of the National Theatre of the Deaf. The one thing that mars this otherwise excellent book is the use of the oppressive concept "crazy" for the letter "C." If not for this very upsetting selection, we would have given Handtalk a four-star rating.***

Fassler, Joan, Howie Helps Himself. Albert Whitman, 1975.

Howie, a child with cerebral palsy, wants more than anything else to be able to move his wheelchair by himself.

This book has a number of serious faults. For one thing, in explaining Howie's disability, there are far too many "cannots": "But there are many things that Howie cannot do at all. Howie's legs are weak, so he cannot run or skip or jump. He cannot walk without something to hold onto. And even then, he cannot go very far or very fast. He cannot ride a bike or climb a tree or chase a ball. Howie's hands are weak, too. He cannot hold a pencil well enough to write his name. He cannot hold a cup steady enough to drink his milk. And he cannot build a tower or a castle with his wooden blocks--not even a very little tower or a very small castle." These "cannots" not only serve to evoke pity in the young reader, but with proper adaptations, Howie can certainly do most of these things (and if he can't hold a pencil, he can be trained to operate a computer).

Another problem is the emphasis on gaining physical ability, and comparing Howie to his other disabled friends: "He wanted to move his wheelchair all by himself. Susan and Jeffrey cuold already do that. But not Howie. He just couldn't." Howie pushes himself to his physical and emotional limit in order to move his wheelchair. We think it is fine for a child to be determined to do something, and to achieve, but it is damaging to promote the concept that getting stronger makes children with disabilities more o.k. It ignores children with, say, muscular dystrophy or other

progressive neuromuscular conditions--children who gradually lose their strength and still are o.k.

Yet another fault is that Howie is in a segregated classroom. We think he'd do just fine in a mainstreamed school.

Finally, but no less important, we object to the characterization of Howie's grandmother as a silly-looking little old lady running down the hill chasing a ball; nor do we like the image of children in a classroom "playing Indian." Don't bother with this book.*

Greenfield, Eloise, Darlene. Methuen, 1980.

Darlene, who uses a wheelchair, is left at her uncle's house. Impatient for her mother's return, she gradually gets involved in adaptive games with her uncle and cousin, Joanne, and, when her mother finally arrives, she decides she no longer wants to go home. Uncle Eddie says, "Darlene, you don't know what you want," to which Darlene replies, "Yes, I do. I want to change my mind when I want to.":

Darlene is a realistic, unsentimental story, where the main character's disability is neither minimized nor unduly emphasized. Instead, she is portrayed as a member of a warm, loving family, a little girl who is just as fun-loving and changeable as anyone else. George Ford's naturalistic, brown-

and-white drawings are just right. (It is also refreshing to see a man in the role of child-care provider and dishwasher.)

Eloise Greenfield is our favorite children's book writer. Check out her other books, too. This one's great!****

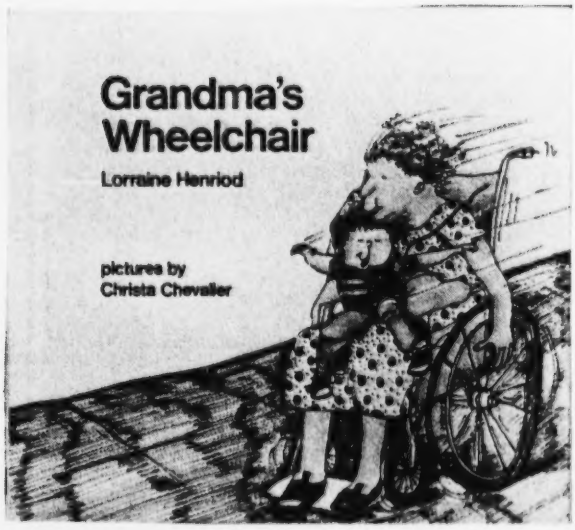
Hasler, Eveline, Martin is Our Friend. Methuen, 1981.

"There's only one boy who can't join in. That's Martin. He can't run or jump like other children. He can only walk with short awkward steps." Martin, who is mobility- and visually-imaired, is ostracized by the neighborhood children. But that's all right--"Martin is a good-natured boy. He doesn't blame the other children when they leave him out of their games. He knows he is slow." Martin goes to a segregrated school, where "some of the children...can't walk and have to be pushed in wheelchairs. Some can't talk properly." Martin discovers a beautiful horse, and its owner, a wealthy woman, decides to allow all the children in the special school to ride. One day, the horse wanders out of the paddock and onto the street, where it becomes disoriented and panicky. No one is able to calm it, except Martin, who leads the horse back to safety. The neighborhood children, who witnessed the event, "were proud to know someone so brave" and "found there were many things they could enjoy with Martin and his friends."

This book promotes several major stereotypes to the young reader: first, because of the negative language, that people with disabilities are to be pitied; second, that disabled people are "good-natured" and don't mind being the butt of other people's jokes; third, that people with disabilities are calmer, gentler, and more "natural" than non-disabled people; and fourth, that children's negative perceptions can be magically changed by one event. Moreover, this book dispenses a classist notion in depicting the children with disabilities as dependent on the good will of a wealthy woman; and the large group of people in the illustrations are all white. We could probably have found more stereotypes if we had spent more time with this book. No redeeming social value.*

Head, Barry, and Jim Seguin, Who Am I? Family Communications, 1975.

Who Am I? is one of a series of video, audio, and print materials entitled, "I AM, I CAN, I WILL," designed for young children with disabilities; but it is a refreshing set for non-disabled children as well. The lovely photos show a young child with a hearing impairment going about her day: hugging her mother, playing with her friends, crying because her skate is broken, participating in class, working with a speech therapist, climbing a tree, and whispering to a girlfriend. Her hearing aid is entirely visible in all but two of the photos, and it is the ordinariness of its inclusion that is important. Also, since there is virtually no text, young children must use totally visual cues to "read" the book. This technique gives young children some insight into how deaf people use visual cues to orient themselves. We love this thoroughly positive little book.****



Henriod, Lorraine, Grandma's Wheelchair. Albert Whitman, 1982.

Mom "doesn't have a lap anymore," says four-year-old Thomas, because she's about to have a baby. So he spends his days with Grandma, who is just perfect. There's always something to do with her--vacuum, do the laundry, make applesauce, read stories, and, best of all, Grandma "always has a lap." Grandma's Wheelchair, which shows how people with disabilities can adapt to everyday life without losing their independence, is an excellent introduction to disability for preschoolers. And the illustrations, by Christa Chevalier, are just as upbeat as Grandma. We especially love the cover, which shows Grandma and her wheelchair, with Thomas on her lap, speeding down the street!****

Klein, Gerda, The Blue Rose. Lawrence Hill, 1974.

Jenny is retarded, but we don't even know the nature of the disability until the end of the book, which is filled with totally saccharin, patronizing, oversimplified metaphors, such as: "And there are many things/other people don't understand about Jenny/that Jenny is like a kitten without a tail/that Jenny hears different music/that she is like a bird with shorter wings/and has to be protected." Yuck!

This is one of the most handicapist, thoroughly offensive books we have ever read, and it is an affront to children and adults with disabilities. Jenny is a cute kid, and the photos are nice, and we hope her family and

friends treat her with more empathy and respect than this insulting, pseudo-poetic book.*

Lasker, Joe, Nick Joins In. Albert Whitman, 1980.

When Nick, who uses a wheelchair, enters a "regular" classroom for the first time, the teacher sensitively allows candid questions from the non-disabled kids, and soon, Nick and his new classmates resolve their initial apprehensions. He makes friends quickly, and when he shows his ingenuity in solving a class problem, he becomes the class hero.

Lasker accomplishes Nick's integration with warmth and affection, and the illustrations of a racially mixed group of children and teachers are well done. We are glad to see another example of how disabled people utilize tremendous ingenuity in problem-solving and creating adaptations. However, Nick's ingenuity comes very close to being a "super-crip" stereotype, where a kid with a disability has to justify his existence by excelling. Another minor problem is the ease with which wheelchair ramps, a special desk, and other adaptations are built for Nick. In real life, it might have taken sit-ins and demonstrations by Nick's family and the rest of the disabled community to make the school accessible. With these reservations, we like this book.***

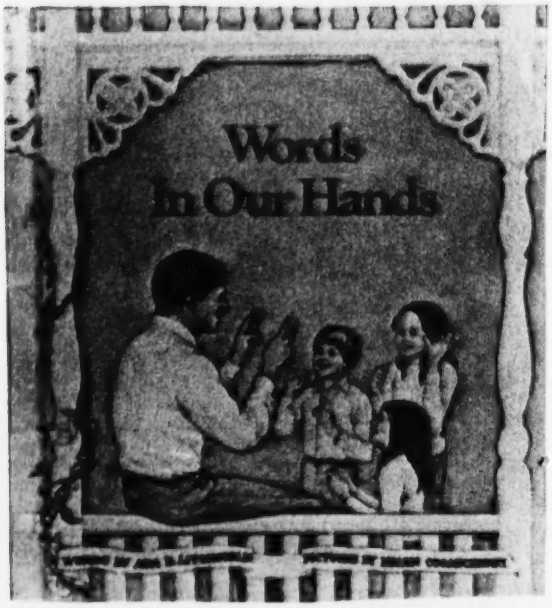
Levine, Edna S., Lisa and Her Soundless World. Human Sciences, 1974.

Lisa, a little girl with impaired hearing, learns in this story to use and understand speech.

We have several major problems with this book. Much of the language is negative. Although Lisa is described as pretty and bright, she is also said to be one of the "children who are not as lucky as you." This phrasing stirs up pity in the reader. If the writer had said, for example, that Lisa is pretty and bright and has a hearing impairment, then the child reader could identify with her limitations, rather than being set apart from her. There is also constant comparison of Lisa's impairment with that of other hearing-impaired and deaf kids, and with hearing kids: "It will take Lisa longer to learn all these things than it takes children who can hear. This is because Lisa must work much harder. But Lisa is smart and she will catch up. NOt all deaf children are as lucky as Lisa. They are just as smart, but it is too hard for them to catch up." This comparison encourages "sameness" and discourages recognition of, and respect for, differences.

Another problem is this book's focus on oralism as the only way for Lisa to learn to communicate. Oralism--speaking and lip-reading--for many years was the only way that deaf people were taught to communicate, so that hearing people could communicate with them. But what about other deaf people? The constant focus on oralism in this and other books evoke in the reader the stereotype that all people with disabilities want to be like non-disabled people. This isn't so, particularly when we look within the deaf community, where the language of choice is ASL, or American Sign Language. The deaf community, by using ASL, is creating a non-hearing world, and authors need to respect deaf culture.

Finally, most hearing people can easily learn to sign, and this or any other form of accommodation is not shared with us in this book.*



Litchfield, Ada B., Words in Our Hands. Albert Whitman, 1980.

In Words, nine-year-old Michael explains the facts and feelings of family life with deaf parents. In this story, beautifully illustrated by Helen Cogancherry, the family is seen as close-knit and loving, as Michael describes the adaptations they make, basic communication techniques (signing, lip-reading, and vocalizing), socialization problems in a new neighborhood, and extra responsibilities that hearing members assume. The parents are seen as independent, competent people who have made the necessary accommodations, and the children take on their extra demands in a natural, matter-of-fact way. Much useful information is presented here in a warm, affectionate story.****

Mack, Nancy, Tracy. Raintree, 1976.

This book shows a day in the life of a child with cerebral palsy, presented factually through Tracy's eyes. The tone is generally positive: she is shown on monkey bars, playing jump rope--"I can't jump rope, of course, but I can turn" (which teaches the reader a useful adaptation), working with the physical therapist, and "fooling around" with her sisters and brothers. She's a spunky kid: "My name's Tracy. I get around." The photos could be better, and there's no racial mixture. It's an otherwise o.k., but not exciting, book.**1/2

Montgomery, Elizabeth Rider, The Mystery of the Boy Next Door. Garrard, 1978.

At first, the kids think the new boy on the block is unfriendly and rude because he doesn't acknowledge their calls and offers to play; but the mystery, which they eventually solve, is that he and his mother are deaf. Introductions over with, "the four friends went to play ball. 'We'll learn to talk to him,' said Bill." Good points: shows misconceptions that hearing people often make about deaf people; shows a girl playing ball with her male friends. It is implausible, though, that a deaf child would be totally unaware that three kids are trying to get his attention for 33 pages. And, unfortunately, here is another book with all-white characters. This is an o.k. book, but not great.**1/2

Peterson, Jeanne Whitehouse, I Have a Sister/My Sister is Deaf. Harper & Row, 1977.

The drawings, by Deborah Kay, are lovely, and evoke warm feelings toward the two children and their friends. The author, who has a deaf sister, has portrayed the children in an appealing, poetic, simple way: "I have a sister who likes to go with me out to the grassy lot behind our house. Today we are stalking deer. I turn to speak to her. I use no voice, just my fingers and my lips. She understands, and walks behind me, stepping where I step. I am the one who listens for small sounds. She is the one who watches for quick movements in the grass." The one drawback for us is that the hearing sister speaks of her deaf sister's experiences. We would have rather had the deaf sister speak for herself.**1/2

Rabe, Berniece, The Balancing Girl. Dutton, 1981.

A first grader who is very good at balancing objects while in her wheelchair and on her crutches thinks up her greatest balancing act ever to benefit the school carnival. Tommy, Margaret's nemesis, belittles her accomplishments and tries to destroy her work. At the end, she scores a small, but important, victory, and everyone cheers The Balancing Girl, even her former enemy.

Margaret's wheelchair and braces are nicely illustrated, and it is obvious that she must make some adjustments. But her disability is not stressed, and she is described by what she can do: "Margaret was very good at balancing. She could balance a book on her head. She could glide along in her wheelchair as nice as you please and the book would not fall off. She could

even balance herself and hop with her crutches." In the end, it's nice to see Margaret triumph.

But there are two major disappointments: one is that there is no context for Tommy's hostility. Is he jealous? Does he have a problem relating to people with disabilities, or to girls? We can't tell. The other problem is that famed children's book illustrator Lillian Hoban should know better than to color all the characters white. We feel that this book's minuses might be a good vehicle for discussion, even with young kids.**1/2

Reuter, Margaret, My Mother is Blind. Children's Press, 1979.

In My Mother, a young boy describes how he and his family come to terms with his mother's blindness. Everyone is upset when she first loses her sight, but after instruction from a rehabilitation counselor, she readily assumes her former activities, and becomes "herself" again.

This book has good information on adaptive training for blind people. However, it is so full of unreconstituted sexism (all the rehabilitative efforts are intended to--and do--return her to the role of housewife and clean-up person for the family, which makes everybody happy), that we kept wishing she'd run away from home.*

Sobol, Harriet, My Brother Steven is Retarded. Macmillan, 1977.

According to the summary, "an 11-year-old girl talks about the mixed feelings she had for her older, mentally retarded brother."

What mixed feelings? She has only appallingly negative things to say about her brother, such as: "if someone in our family has to be retarded, I'd rather it were Steven than me. Maybe that's not very nice, but it's true anyway...I guess I love Steven because he's my brother, but many times I think he's hard to love. He doesn't look the same as other children, and he makes funny noises and sort of talks funny. He doesn't always use the right word for things, and because he mumbles it's hard to understand him." She goes on to describe her jealousy because her parents spend more time with him than with her, her embarrassment at the way he behaves in public, her anger when kids tease her, and her pity for him, because he will never be independent. What a depressing little book--not recommended.*

Sullivan, Mary Beth, and Linda Bourke, A Show of Hands. Scholastic, 1980.

The back jacket says, "Roll up your sleeves, wiggle your fingers, and prepare to 'speak' with your hands. Learn the expressive language used by many deaf and hearing-impaired people. Order French fries. Say your name. Discover Dracula's favorite sign--all without opening your mouth!"

This book is as upbeat and fun as it says it is. In comic-book format, with fast-moving and witty dialogue, a deaf teenager and her friends, a multi-racial group of kids, teach the reader over 150 signs. We read it several times, just for the fun. It's great!****

Wahl, Jan, Jamie's Tiger. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

Jamie lost his hearing after contracting German measles. Distressed and angry at this retreat into silence, he pretends his pet stuffed tiger is drowning out all the noise. But after a medical examination, getting a hearing aid, learning some signing, and being able to teach other children how to communicate with him, he adapts to his impairment, and the tiger's growl changes to a purr.

This is a gentle, supportive treatment of a young boy's adaptation to hearing loss, made more moving by Tomie de Paola's drawings. A little extra we were happy to see is a bicycle-riding grandma. We like this book.****

White, Paul, Janet at School. Crowell, 1978.

Five-year-old Janet is a cheerful, spunky little girl with spina bifida. She attends a "regular" classroom, where she "has lots of friends, and in the playground she joins in most of their games. She can't jump rope herself, but she likes turning the rope while the others jump." This is a straightforward, caring account of Janet's daily life, and the adaptations she makes. We're sure young readers would want to meet Janet. "If you meet Janet," the book says, "you might want to know how her wheelchair works. If so, just ask. She'll probably be very pleased to show you." This is a nice book, marred only by the lack of children of color, which is why we gave it only three stars instead of four.***

Wolf, Bernard, Anna's Silent World. Lippencott, 1977.

Six-year-old Anna, who has a profound hearing loss, receives special training in lip-reading and the use of hearing aids. After four years of therapy, Anna goes to school with hearing children.

Wolf's black-and-white photographs capture this smart, active, happy child at play, at school, and at therapy. Unfortunately, Anna is being trained to be an oralist, and there is no mention of American Sign Language, the language of the deaf community. Not too long ago, deaf children were forced to sit on their hands, so as to stifle their signing. We feel that by teaching deaf children only to lip-read and speak, and not teaching them to sign, they are being denied access to their culture.

We like this book for the information about adaptive training for deaf people, but we don't like it for its elimination of a very important way of communicating.**

Zelonky, Joy, I Can't Always Hear You. Raintree, 1980.

When Kim, who has a hearing impairment, begins a "regular" school after having attended a deaf school, she has some difficulty adjusting. She soon finds, however, with the assistance of her teacher and her principal (who is also hearing-impaired), that everyone has individual differences.

This is a very good "some-ways-the-same, some-ways-different" story, told from Kim's point of view. Another plus is the multi-cultural nature of the story: Kim is Japanese-American, her mother is Japanese, and she has an

integrated group of friends. The illustrations, by Shirlee Jensen, warmly compliment the story, and show Kim's battery pack and hearing aid. Good introduction for older (third grade) kids on similarities and differences, and on hearing impairment. We wish, however, that Kim could have taught her friends how to sign.****

A few words about fairy tales

Equally as negative and offensive as handicapist stereotypes, and often interwoven in the same mean-spirited stories, are racist, sexist, ageist, and "looksist" stereotypes. One of the best (or worst) examples, for us, is Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and especially, the Disney version.

Like practically everyone else in this culture, we grew up with Snow White and the other fairy tales and Disney cartoons, and we feel that they have dangerous messages to which young children should not be exposed.

For the first part, Snow White is beautiful because she is white, "the fairest of them all." The fact that the fairest of them all is snow white Snow White, may very well lead young children who are less white to doubt their own beauty.

The emphasis on beauty and perfection is exemplified by Snow White's mother, who sits passively, dreaming at the window, wishing for a child "with skin white as snow, lips read as blood, and hair black as coal." Why?

Why Snow White is a heroine leaves much to be questioned, too. She's allegedly pretty, she sings while she sweeps, and manages to be poisoned into a trance, to be awakened by a prince. So?

We are told in the story that she is as good as she is beautiful, but what constitutes goodness has not been demonstrated, other than packing lunches for short-statured people. Goodness, in this story, does not mean smartness, or compassion, or creativity, or any of the other things that we generally consider make people who they are.

The message here is that if you are a white, beautiful, passive woman, you will get everything you want, which is (in Snow White's mother's case) a white, beautiful, passive daughter, or (in Snow White's case) a rich man who will take care of you.

The other side of the feminine coin is the wicked stepmother. Again, because beauty is the only desirable attitude that empowers women, she is so enraged at seeing someone more beautiful than she, that she orders Snow White killed. The only way that powerful women are portrayed in fairy tales is to be wicked, evil, and murderous. But at least the wicked stepmother isn't vacuous like Snow White.

On the subject of dwarfism: It's an ancient stereotype that short-statured people are cute and funny. They were jesters in the royal courts of Europe. Other stories which are equally as offensive in this way include Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, The Wizard of Oz, and The Hobbit.

We personally happen to know people of short stature who are dignified, intelligent, adult, and funny only in appropriate situations. We also know one who isn't. We know tall people who are funny, too.

We feel that fairy tales, such as Snow White, Hansel and Gretel, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and the rest contain socially damaging messages. For young children, we prefer stories with positive values.

Recommended Books: Disabilities

Adams, Barbara, Like It Is: Facts and Feelings About Handicaps From Kids Who Know. Walker, gr. 4-up (various disabilities).

Aseltine, Lorraine, et. al., I'm Deaf and It's Okay. Whitman, gr. 2-5 (deafness).

Baldwin, Anne Norris, A Little Time. Viking, gr. 3-5 (Down Syndrome).

Benham, Helen, Scholastic's Feeling Free Activities and Stories. Scholastic, gr. 4-up (various disabilities).

Biklin, Douglas, Ellen Barnes, and Carol Berrigan, What's the Difference? American Institutes for Research and Syracuse University, gr. 4-up (various disabilities).

Biklin, Douglas, and Michelle Sokoloff, What Do You Do When Your Wheelchair Gets a Flat Tire? Scholastic Book Services, gr. 1-8 (various disabilities).

Bennett, Carol, Giant Steps for Steven. After School Exchange, gr. ps-5 (spina bifida).

Cairo, Shelley, Our Brother Has Down's Syndrome. Annick Press (Firefly), gr. ps-3 (Down Syndrome).

Charlip, Remy, Mary Beth, and George Ancona, Handtalk. Four Winds, gr. ps-up (deafness).

Girion, Barbara, A Handful of Stars. Laurel-Leaf, gr. 7-up (epilepsy).

Greenfield, Eloise, Alesia. Putnam, gr. 5-up (mobility impairment).

Greenfield, Eloise, Darlene. Methuen, gr. ps-3 (mobility impairment).

Head, Barry, and Jim Seguin, Who Am I? Family Communications (Hubbard), gr. ps-2 (deafness).

Henriod, Lorraine, Grandma's Wheelchair. Whitman, gr. ps-2 (mobility impairment).

Herzig, Alison Cragin, A Season of Secrets. Little, Brown, gr. 5-7 (epilepsy).

Hilbok, Bruce, Silent Dancer. Messner, gr. 3-6 (deafness).

Jensen, Virginia Allen, and Dorcas Woodbury Haller, What's That? William Collins & World, gr. ps-3 (visual impairment).

Jones, Rebecca C., Angie and Me. Macmillan, gr. 5-8 (juvenile rheumatoid arthritis).

Kent, Deborah, Belonging. Dial, gr. 6-up (blindness).

Kamien, Janet, What If You Couldn't...? Scribner's gr. 4-up (various disabilities).

Lasker, Joe, He's My Brother. Whitman, gr. 3-up (learning disability).

Lasker, Joe, Nick Joins In. Whitman, gr. 2-5 (mobility impairment).

Litchfield, Ada B., A Button in Her Ear. Whitman, gr. ps-3 (hearing impairment).

Litchfield, Ada B., Making Room for Uncle Joe. Whitman, gr. 1-3 (Down Syndrome).

Litchfield, Ada B., Words in Our Hands. Whitman, gr. 2-5 (deafness).

MacLachlin, Patricia, Through Grandpa's Eyes. Harper & Row, gr. 2-4 (blindness).

Mertens, Winnie, My Feet Roll. Before We Are Six, gr. ps-1 (mobility impairment).

Nadas, Betsy, Danny's Song. Family Communications (Hubbard), gr. ps-1 (mobility impairment).

Newth, Philip, Roly Goes Exploring. Philomel Books, gr. ps-2 (blindness).

Norris, Carolyn Brimley, Signs Unseen, Sounds Unheard. Alinda Press, gr. 7-up (deafness).

Peterson, Jeanne Whitehouse, I Have a Sister/My Sister is Deaf. Harper & Row, gr. 1-4 (deafness).

Rabe, Berniece, The Balancing Girl. Dutton, gr. ps-3 (mobility impairment).

Riskind, Mary, Apple is My Sign. Houghton Mifflin, gr. 5-8 (deafness).

Sachs, Elizabeth-Ann, Just Like Always. Atheneum, gr. 5-up (scoliosis).

Sargent, Susan, My Favorite Place. Abingdon, gr. k-3 (blindness).

Savitz, Harriet May, Run, Don't Walk. Franklin Watts, gr. 7-up (mobility impairment).

Sullivan, Mary Beth, A Show of Hands. Scholastic, gr. 4-8 (deafness).

Sullivan Mary Beth, Alan J. Brightman, and Joseph Blatt, Feeling Free. Addison-Wesley, gr. 4-up (various disabilities).

Wahl, Jan, Jamie's Tiger. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, gr. ps-4 (deafness).,

White, Paul, Janet at School. Crowell, gr.1-6 (spina bifida).

Wosmek, Frances, A Bowl of Sun. Children's Press, gr. 1-4 (blindness).

Wright, Betty Ren, My Sister is Different. Raintree, gr. k-5 (developmental disability).

Zelonky, Joy, I Can't Always Hear You. Raintree, gr. 3-up (hearing impairment).

KIDS (Keys to Introducing Disability in Society) Project is a non-profit training and educational organization of people with disabilities. We began our programs as an outgrowth of the Center for Independent Living, because, as disabled adults, we wanted to ensure more effective integration of children with disabilities into the schools. By having students and teachers trained by disabled people, we provide direct intervention to dispel myths and stereotypes. Since 1978, our disabled trainers and co-teachers have brought inclusionary toys, games, stories, songs, books, adaptive equipment, in-formation, and enthusiasm to hundreds of classrooms throughout California. For information about our programs and curriculum materials, write: KIDS Project, 1720 Oregon St., Room 3, Berkeley, CA 94703; or phone: (415) 548-4121.